

How to "Drink Responsibly"

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"Drink Responsibly!" You hear that a lot these days, particularly at the end of an alcohol ad. But how many people know what it means? The holiday season is a good time to learn about safe drinking practices. But, it is not very easy and, as a society, we do a poor job in providing the tools to help.

Most people concerned about responsible drinking monitor their number of drinks. But, never assume that what you are served or sold equals a single drink. It may come in a single-sized glass or bottle, but the alcohol content can vary substantially, bars often "over-pour" wine and many popular spirit drinks have multiple shots.

Safe practices require that you know what a standard drink is. The federal government defines it as follows:

- 12 ounces of beer that is 5% Alcohol by Volume (ABV)
- 5 ounces of wine that is 12% ABV
- 1.5 ounces of spirits that is 40% ABV (80 proof)

Next, you must know how much alcohol you are drinking. This isn't easy since not all products have to list their alcohol content. Let's consider some of the products by type:

Beer: Most beer cans or bottles are 12 ounces and contain 4-6% alcohol. However, larger containers are available and sometimes craft beers are more potent. For example, a 16 oz. beer with 8% alcohol is slightly more than two standard drinks. And, a 24 ounce can of 12% alcohol content is almost five standard drinks.

Wine: Wine is typically sold in a 750 milliliter bottle which contains about 5 standard drinks if the alcohol content is 12%. To serve a "standard drink" you must be able to pour 5 ounces of 12% alcohol wine. If the wine is 14%, 8 ounces will be almost two drinks. Try measuring in a wine glass at home. You will see that 5 ounces looks like a glass half-full and 8 ounces produces a full glass.

Spirits: Hard liquor is also typically sold in a 750 milliliter bottle, but will contain almost 17 standard drinks if the alcohol content is 40% or 80 proof. When serving spirits, you should use a measuring device in order to know how much you are drinking or serving to another. Today, multi-shot drinks

are very popular, so you should never assume that a drink in a bar is a standard drink. You can ask your server how much alcohol is in the drink. And, you must be aware of some exceptionally potent drinks such as Long Island Iced Tea which is often the equivalent of 3-5 drinks in a single glass.

In addition to standard drink size, you need to know how much you can regularly drink and remain healthy and safe. Most experts recommend moderate consumption for those who choose to drink. Federal Dietary Guidelines state: "Moderate alcohol consumption is defined as up to 1 drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men."

Finally, there is the issue of drinking and driving. In most states, you are presumed to be impaired if your Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) is .08 or more. The difficulty is that BAC is almost impossible for an individual to monitor with any accuracy. This is because many factors impact the BAC level such as weight, gender, different metabolism rates, health issues, medication taken, drinking frequency, and amount of food in the stomach. Given this difficulty plus the problem of determining how many "standard drinks" you have had, the safest route is to ride with someone who has not been drinking or take a taxi.

Have a safe holiday season and support efforts to give consumers better tools to "drink responsibly."